

The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

By HALLIE ERMINE RIVES

ILLUSTRATIONS by LAUREN STOUT

SYNOPSIS.

John Valiant, a rich society favorite, suddenly discovers that the Valiant corporation, which he had founded and which was the principal source of his wealth, has failed. He voluntarily turns over his private fortune to the receiver for the corporation. His entire remaining possessions consist of an old motor car, a white bull dog and Damory court, a neglected estate in Virginia. On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an aristocratic beauty, and decides that he is going to like Virginia immensely. Shirley's mother, Mrs. Dandridge, and Major Bristow exchange reminiscences during which it is revealed that the major, Valiant's father, and a man named Saxon were rivals for the hand of Mrs. Dandridge in her youth. Saxon and Valiant fought a duel on her account in which the former was killed. Valiant finds Damory court overgrown with weeds and creepers and the buildings in a very much neglected condition. He decides to rehabilitate the place and make the land produce a living for him. Valiant saves Shirley from the bite of a snake, which bites him. Knowing the deadliness of the bite, Shirley saves his life.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

"Listen, Shirley. What's that Riekey is telling Ranson?"

"Don't you come heah wid yo' no-count play-actin'. Cyn' fool Ranson wid no sich snek-story, neidah. Ain't no moosin' at Dam'ry Co't, en nebah was!"

"There was, too!" insisted Riekey. "One bit him and Miss Shirley found him and sent Uncle Jefferson for Doctor Southall and it saved his life! So there! Doctor Southall told Mrs. Mason. And he isn't a man who's just come to fix it up, either; he's the really truly man that owns it!"

"Who on earth is that child talking about?"

Shirley put her arm around her mother and kissed her. Her heart was beating quickly. "The owner has come to Damory Court. He—"

The small book Mrs. Dandridge held fell to the floor. "The owner! What owner?"

"Mr. Valiant—Mr. John Valiant. The son of the man who abandoned it so long ago." As she picked up the fallen volume and put it into her mother's hands, Shirley was startled by the whiteness of her face.

"Dearest!" she cried. "You are ill. You shouldn't have come down."

"No. It's nothing. I've been shut up all day. Go and open the other window."

Shirley threw it wide. "Can I get your salts?" she asked anxiously.

Her mother shook her head. "No," she said, almost sharply. "There's nothing whatever the matter with me. Only my nerves aren't what they used to be, I suppose—and snakes always did get on them. Now, give me the glass of fruit. I can wait for the rest."

There's a tenant at Damory Court. And his name's John—Valiant. And he was bitten by a moccasin. When?"

"This afternoon."

Mrs. Dandridge's voice shook. "Will he—will he recover?"

"Oh, yes."

"Beyond any question?"

"The doctor says so."

"And you found him, Shirley—"

"I was there when it happened." She had crouched down on the rug in her favorite posture, her coppery hair against her mother's knee, catching strange reddish overtones like molten metal, from the shaded lamp. Mrs. Dandridge fingered her cane nervously. Then she dropped her hand on the girl's head.

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CHAPTER XV.

The Anniversary.

The story was not a long one, though it omitted nothing; the morning fox-hunt and the identification of the new arrival at Damory Court as the owner of yesterday's stalled motor; the afternoon raid on the jessamine, the conversation with John Valiant in the woods.

Mrs. Dandridge, gazing into the fire, listened without comment, but more than once Shirley saw her hands clasp themselves together and thought, too, that she seemed strangely pale. The swift and tragic sequel to that meeting was the hardest to tell, and as she ended she put up her hand to her shoulder, holding it hard. "It was horrible!" she said. Yet now she did not shudder. Strangely enough, the sense of loathing which had been surging over her at recurrent intervals ever since that hour in the wood, had vanished utterly!

She read the newspaper article aloud and her mother listened with an expression that puzzled her. When she finished, both were silent for a moment, then she asked, "You must have known his father, dearest; didn't you?"

FRIEND WORTH THE KEEPING

European Merchant Showed His Appreciation of Newspaper in Substantial Manner.

Nothing pleases a newspaper more than letters of appreciation from its readers. The most hardened old editor will flush up and tears of joy will fill his cynical eyes when "Veteran Subscriber" or "Constant Reader" writes in to say that yesterday's smashing attack was the best ever.

Here in America letters of appreciation are all that any editor can hope for. Abroad, however, it is different. French editors are frequently rewarded for good articles by presents of roses, gold fountain pens, baskets of fruit, and so forth.

But nowhere in the world does there exist such a Maecenas of the press as good old Mr. Bimbo, the leading pork dealer of central Europe.

Mr. Bimbo lives in Budapest, and a year ago the Budapest Biscuitette published an interview with him, which stated so accurately all his political views that he sent forthwith to the

"Yes," said Mrs. Dandridge after a pause. "I—knew his father."

Shirley said no more, and facing each other in the candle-glow, across the spotless damask, they talked, as with common consent, of other things. She thought she had never seen her mother more brilliant. An odd excitement was flooding her cheek with red and she chatted and laughed as she had not done for years.

But after dinner the gaiety and effervescence faded quickly and Mrs. Dandridge went early to her room. She mounted the stair with her arm thrown about Shirley's pliant waist. At her door she kissed her, looking at her with a strange smile. "How curious," she said, as if to herself, "that it should have happened today!"

The reading-lamp had been lighted on her table. She drew a slim gold chain from the bosom of her dress and held to the light a little locket-brooch it carried. It was of black enamel, with a tiny laurel-wreath of pearls on one side encircling a single diamond. The other side was of crystal and covered a baby's russet-colored curl. In her fingers it opened and disclosed a miniature at which she looked closely for a moment.

Her eyes turned restlessly about the room. It had been hers as a girl, for Rosewood had been the old Garland homestead. It seemed now all at once to be full of calling memories of her youth.

"How strange that it should have been today!" It had been on Shirley's lips to question, but the door had closed, and she went slowly downstairs. She sat a while thinking, but at length grew restless and began to walk to and fro across the floor. Her hands clasped behind her head so that the cool air filled her flowing sleeves. In the hall she could hear the leisurely kon-kon—kon-kon of the tall clock. The evening outside was exquisitely still and the metallic monotone was threaded with the airy fiddle-fiddle of crickets in the grass and punctuated with the rain-glad clasp of a frog. Shirley stepped lightly down to the wet grass. Looking back, she could see her mother's lighted blind. All around the ground was spotted with rose-petals, looking in the squares of light like bloody rain. She skimmed the lawn and ran a little way down the lane. A shuffling sound presently fell on her ear.

"Is that you, Uncle Jefferson?" she called softly.

"Yes'm!" The footsteps came nearer. "It's me, Miss Shirley." He tittered noiselessly, and she could see his bent form vibrating in the gloom. "Yo' reck'n Ah done fergit?"

"No, indeed. I knew you wouldn't do that. How is he?"

"He right much better," he replied in the same guarded tone. "Doctah he say he be all right in er few days."

"Oh, yes."

"Beyond any question?"

"The doctor says so."

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"There!" she whispered, and slipped back through the perfumed dark.

An hour later she stood in the cozy stillness of her bedroom. She threw off her gown, slipped into a soft loose robe of maize-colored silk and stood before the small glass. She pulled out the amber pins and drew her wonderful hair on either side of her face, looking out at her reflection like a mermaid from between the rippling waves of a moon-golden sea.

At last she turned, and seating herself at the desk, took from it a diary. She scanned the pages at random, her eyes catching lines here and there. "A good run today. Betty and Judge Chalmers and the Pendleton boys. My fourth brush this season." A frown drew itself across her brows, and she turned the page. "One of the bounds broke his leg, and I gave him to Riekey." * * * "Chilly Lusk to dinner today, after swimming the Loring Rapid."

She bit her lip, turned abruptly to the new page and took up her pen. "This morning a twelve-mile run to Damory Court," she wrote. "This afternoon went for cape jessamines." There she paused. The happenings and sensations of that day would not be recorded. They were unwelcome.

She laid down her pen and put her forehead on her clasped hands. How empty and inane these entries seemed beside this rich and eventful twenty-four hours just passed! What had she been doing a year ago today? she wondered. The lower drawer of the desk held a number of slim diaries like the one before her. She pulled it out, took up the last-year's volume and opened it.

"Why," she said in surprise, "I got jessamine for mother this very day last year!" she pondered frowning, then reached for a third and a fourth. From these she looked up, startled. That date in her mother's calendar called for cape jessamines. What was the fourteenth of May to her?

She bent a slow troubled gaze about her. The room had been hers as a child. She seemed suddenly back in that childhood, with her mother bending over her pillow and fondling her rebellious hair. When the wind cried for loneliness out in the dark she had sung old songs to her. Sad songs! Even in those pinfleur years Shirley had vaguely realized that pain lay behind the brave gay mask. Was there something—some event—that had caused that dull-colored life and fulfillment? And was today, perhaps, its anniversary?

John Valiant sat propped up on the library couch, an open magazine unheeded on his knee. The reading-stand beside him was a litter of letters and papers. The bow-window was open and the honeysuckle breeze blew about him, lifting his hair and ruffling the leaves of the papers. In the garden three darkies were laboring, under the supervision of Uncle Jefferson. The unsightly weeds and lichen were gone from the gravelled paths, and from the fountain pool, whose shaft now sprouted a slender spray shivered by the breeze into a million diamonds, which fell back into the pool with a tinkling trickle and drip.

The master of Damory Court closed the magazine with a sigh. "If I could only do it all at once!" he muttered. "It takes such a confounded time. Four days they've been working now, and they haven't done much more than clean up." He laughed, and threw the magazine at the dog who dodged it with injured alacrity. "After all, Chum," he remarked, "it's been thirty years getting in this condition. I guess we're doing pretty well."

He stretched luxuriously. "I'll take a hand at it myself tomorrow. I'm as right as rain again now, thanks to Aunt Daph and the doctor. Something of a crusty citizen, the doctor, but he's all to the good."

A heavy step came along the porch and Uncle Jefferson appeared with a tray holding a covered dish with a plate of biscuit and a round jam-pot. "Look here," said John Valiant, "I had my luncheon three hours ago. I'm being stuffed like a milk-fed turkey."

The old man smiled widely. "It's jo' er I'll anaek er broth," he said. "Reck'n e'll kinder fowl eroun' de yuddah things. Dis' yeah pot's dat apple-buttah whut Miss Mattie Sue sen' yo' by Riekey Snyder."

Valiant sniffed with satisfaction. "I'm getting so contentedly spoiled," he said, "that I'm tempted to stay sick and do nothing but eat. By the way, Uncle Jefferson, where did Riekey come from? Does she belong here?"

added to his color also, and now he is blue. His eyes are sunken and dim, his ears no longer stand up in true donkey style, but droop dejectedly. He has to trot his best to keep up with Sheba's slowest stride. About every three miles he balks, but little Cora Belle doesn't call it balking, she says Belle has stopped to rest, and they sit and wait till he is ready to trot along again. That is the kind of lay-out which drew over her door that evening.—The Atlantic.

Trick of the Orator.

Disraeli, whose eloquence Lord Curzon ranks below that of Gladstone, tried hard to give his hearers the impression that he was not in the habit of preparing his speeches. Discussing Plunkett's oratory with Disraeli, Lord Granville remarked that the Irish statesman hesitated so long for a word that he seemed to be on the point of breaking down. "Bless you," Disraeli exclaimed, "Did that take you in? Why, that was part of the trick. I have often done it to make it appear that my speech has not been prepared."

Corra Belle's Team.

Corra Belle's team would bring a smile to the soberest face alive. Sheba is a tall, lanky old mare. Once she was bay in color, but the years have added gray hair until now she is roan. Being so long-legged she strides along at an amazing pace, which her mate, Balam, a little donkey, finds it hard to keep up with. Balam, like Sheba, is full of years. Once his glossy brown coat was the pride of some Mexican's heart, but time has

"No, suh. She come fom Hell's Half-Acre."

"What's that?"

"Dat's dat ornery palse o' folks yondah on de Dome," explained Uncle Jefferson. "Dey's been dah long Ah kin recommendah—los' er ramshackle lot o' shifless po'-white trash whut git erlong anyways 't all."

"That's interesting," said Valiant. "So Riekey belonged there?"

"Yas, suh; nebah 'd a-come down heah 'cep'n' fo' Miss Shirley. She de one whut foteh de I'll gal outen dat place, en put hah wid Miss Mattie Sue, three yeah ergo."

A sudden color came into John Valiant's cheeks. "Tell me about it." His voice vibrated eagerly.

"Well,